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The Third International Conference on Baptist Studies
will be held at IBTS from
16-19 July 2003

The subject is '**Baptist Identities**'

Professor Bill Brackney, Baylor University, Texas,
will give a keynote address entitled: **Establishing the Limits of Identity:
Baptists who Dared to Cross the Line**

Speakers from Europe will include

Professor Erich Geldbach, University of Bochum, Germany
Dr Densil Morgan, University of Wales, Bangor
Dr Karen Smith, South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff
The Revd Toivo Pilli, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague

Speakers expected from America include

Dr Dan Goodwin, Atlantic Baptist University, New Brunswick
Dr Tim Weber, Northern Baptist Seminary, Chicago
Dr David Goatley, Lott Carey Missionary Convention

There will be papers on aspects of African Baptist life from **Dr Henry Mugabe**, Harare, on Naga Baptists from **Professor Bob Frykenburg**, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and on Baptists in areas of the Pacific from **Dr Brian M. Howell**, Wheaton College, Illinois and **Dr Ken Manley**, Whitley College, Melbourne, Australia.

The two previous ICOBS conferences, in Oxford, England (1997), and Wake Forest University, North Carolina, USA (2000), have been highly stimulating events.

It is possible to incorporate in the programme some short papers – 'communications' – and if you wish to offer such a paper please contact Dr Ian Randall, Randall@ibts.cz

The cost of the conference, which lasts from Wednesday afternoon, 16 July, to Saturday lunch-time, 19 July, 2003, is \$185.00 US.

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EDITORIAL

With this issue of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* we mark the commencement of the third volume. In our first issue of September 2000 we stated our aim to give Baptists in Europe the opportunity to explore issues of theology and practice that are relevant to them.

We believe that in the six previous issues of this *Journal* we have demonstrated this principle and there is no clearer example of this than in the current edition. Indeed, our two major contributions take theological tools and apply them to practical issues.

Lina Andronoviene explores a very pertinent issue for the majority of Baptist churches in Europe – the disproportionate number of women to men within our congregations and the situation faced by Christian single women within such communities. Her call to take seriously the needs and gifts of those sisters who are single because of the circumstances and not by choice is one we need to act on. Can the Baptist churches of Europe really develop ‘communities of inclusion’ which recognise the particular struggles of this important group within our churches?

Then René Erwich, recently appointed Rector of our Dutch Baptist Seminary, asks pertinent theological questions about the natural church development model of Christian A. Schwarz. Schwarz is very influential amongst many Baptists in Europe, but important theological questions must be asked about the analysis he offers and the methodology he uses. Dr Erwich does this in his customary rigorous way. The missiological challenge of growing new churches across our continent makes this a timely piece.

One continuing aim of the *Journal* is to help us to better understand our past so that we can more confidently build for our future. The church is about people, and some individuals play key roles beyond particular local communities. Miroslav Patalon reflects on the life and work of Polish Baptist Łukasz Dziekuć-Malej, and our book reviews feature George Beasley-Murray and Duke K McCall, two highly influential people of the second half of the last century.

The Revd Keith G Jones
Rector, IBTS

INVOLUNTARILY FREE: SINGLE WOMEN IN THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY

‘Is he married?’ This is a question I hear from a friend of mine nearly every time I mention any more-or-less-decent personality of the masculine gender. Now I do not find this question difficult: ‘yes’; ‘no’; ‘don’t know’. Answers and reactions get more complicated when she blurts out in a semi-public church meeting, ‘Have you seen any free man in this church who would not be a noodlehead?!’ Well, our definitions of a noodlehead differ slightly, but she does have a point. She would like to get married very much, but there are so few single men in our church that her chances are amounting to zero.

Since it is a forced situation, singleness presents a serious problem for the church. Those affected by it are almost exclusively women; hence the confines of my focus. In the following pages I will be concerned with those women who would wish not to be single, not those single by choice. What is the responsibility of the church for these women? It lies, I contend, in two areas. For one thing, the situation is such that there are many more ‘sisters’ than ‘brothers’ in our communities. Can the church do something about normalising the proportion, and to what extent? Yet it would be unrealistic to hope that the problem will disappear. How, then, should the church respond to Christian singleness as a reality in her midst? Before turning to these two questions, however, the first step is to review the current situation.

Mapping the Problem

An unevenness of male-female proportion for the church worldwide is a commonly accepted fact.¹ I will approach the problem of involuntary singleness with the churches of the baptistic tradition in post-communist Europe in mind, this being the environment I am most familiar with. My thoughts and suggestions will reflect on the specifics of this context. For example, the Baptist church in Klaipeda, Lithuania, to which my friend and I belong, currently has one hundred and sixty-two members. Forty-six of them are men, a few of them singles. Fifty-four of my believing sisters are married. The rest, that is, sixty-two, are single: never married, divorced, or widowed.

¹ For an interesting interpretation of gender variations in religiosity, see Edward H. Thompson, Jr., ‘Beneath the Status Characteristic: Gender Variation in Religiousness’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 4 (1991), pp. 381-395.

The disproportion of men and women in this church, as well as in other communities of post-communist Europe, has consequences for the marital status of the church members, since marrying outside the church is usually subject to strong disapproval. The dynamics of society indicate that the problem will only increase in the following years. What do our churches say in responding to the fact that today there are so many single women in their midst, and very likely even more tomorrow? What plans and hopes do they foster for the present of these women — and the future?

Listening to the sermons preached and other kinds of talks given, the programmes organised, the literature circulating, one would conclude that the church implicitly, if not explicitly, encourages women to hope for the realisation of God's 'plan' embodied in marriage, a proof of God's goodness and care. Well, the results show there to be something wrong, either with God and his plan or with our perception about these matters. Many of our sisters, after joining the believing community, stay single for the rest of their lives.

How do they tend to respond to the dichotomy of a theology of marriage as God's plan and the reality of singleness? Some develop a feeling of guilt and take their status as God's judgement on their shortcomings — for God is supposed to reward those he likes, and marriage surely is one of the most prized awards, isn't it? Such a response is easily transformed into a certain striving for holiness understood in terms of very carefully following the (biblical, it is perceived) rules and regulations, in the hopes of achieving the status of a Christian worthy of the God-sent husband. Perhaps it is also a way to entertain oneself in order to escape the feelings of bitterness, restlessness, and depression. These feelings are kept suppressed for fear of the inadmissibility of accusing God. Yet some other women do release their bitterness and disillusionment with the empty prophecies. They pursue marrying an outsider and, in most cases, leave the community, although they may come back later, sometimes already divorced and with children, to join the ranks of the church singles. Still others remain in the community and do not marry, some of them battling the pain and frustration for many years. The suffering that these sisters of ours undergo is already a sufficient reason for giving thought to the way the church can serve them better; yet there is one more reason. The struggles of these women create a strain that has an effect on the whole community. As Paul would put it, when certain members of the body suffer, the whole body suffers with them (1Cor

12:26) — if not out of empathy, then as a consequence of anger, bitterness, and strained relationships.²

At the same time, society at large, with its sex-oriented or, in Stanley Grenz's words, 'sexually disoriented'³ culture, puts an enormous strain on the single believers and the whole church. The contrast is especially stark in the former communist countries, for the concept of 'there is no sex in the Soviet Union', in the words of a Soviet woman pronounced some fifteen years ago, has briskly turned into the worship, or at least calm acceptance, of exposed sexuality. Suddenly we all, including the church, find ourselves in a radically different environment which accepts such exposed sexuality as a way of life. As in the case of my provocative friend quoted above, she gets very surprised looks when she admits, shyly, that she in fact does not live with a boyfriend — nor does she have one. Our sisters have both to struggle with some of their emotional and bodily needs not being met and also to withstand the pressure (and sometimes even the scorn or pity) from the wider society. If the church is to continue the witness of singleness as a credible form of life, it had better responsibly assess the issues these women are facing. The response of the church, however, will be genuine only if she speaks and acts out of the pain of loneliness and sexual unfulfilment of the single sisters as if it were her own — for the truth is, it is her own.

A suitable place to start is to consider whether something can be done in helping them to find a marriage partner. What is the church's role in this enterprise?

The Matchmaker Church

I do believe the church can, and should, take some efforts to help its single members to marry. A young single woman once remarked to me:

It is no use to sit in your church doing nothing about your singleness. If there are no people in your own environment, there are Christians at other places and other towns. A single woman should be more active and willing to explore and make new acquaintances.⁴

My argument, however, is that the task should not be left for single women themselves to handle. The believing community should engage in some creative practices of socialising. In some sense, it should perceive

² The problem arises both from those who are single and angry, depressed, or envious for the 'happy couples,' as well as from the side of those married who are distrustful in regard to their single brothers or (in most cases) sisters. As one sister has put it, 'as soon as I was widowed, I was perceived as a threat in a group of my closest friends from the church—all of whom were coupled.' (Personal interview with Respondent A, April 30, 2002, available through the author. For the sake of confidentiality here and in the future, personal details have been withheld.)

³ Stanley Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: A Biblical Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1990), p. 1.

⁴ Personal interview with Respondent B, April 15, 2002, available through the author.

itself as a matchmaker.⁵ As always, particular expressions of such a task will differ depending on the peculiarities of a church. Here, however, are several initial strategies to consider.

One of the embodiments of the care for singles is socialising between single people among the churches of the same denomination. Of this particular practice we can indeed often speak in the present tense: youth camps, song festivals and other special celebrations, partnership between the churches, etc., are supported by most baptistic communities of post-communist Europe.

Another way to ‘stir the blood’ is to allow for some interdenominational socialising, by such occasions as joint services, social projects, Christian cafes, etc. This is a more difficult way, for it involves questions of ecumenical co-operation with which some churches are quite uncomfortable, and requires a generous attitude in regard to ‘sharing’ members. However, given a healthy atmosphere, it might be an excellent tool that helps not only the needs of single believers but also strengthens connections and networking, especially for the churches of the same area.

Yet such types of ‘sharing’ still leave us with the same proportion of male and female singles overall. My husband jokingly insists that God surely loves women more than men, and the gender proportion in the churches should be the best proof of it from the Calvinist perspective! But, on a more serious note, gender differences do seem to play a role in religiosity, even though there has not been much research conducted on the reasons.⁶ Can we give some thought as to the ways the church gets converts? It might be worthwhile to explore such factors as social influences as well as individual peculiarities of female psychology.⁷ Rethinking the theological language of the church, for example, the male imaging of God, may provide some explanation as to why and how the Christian faith seems to be more appealing to the female side of humanity. It seems that common evangelism methods are also particularly, even if unconsciously, aimed at the receptivity of women – the stirring of emotions through the music accompanying the ‘altar call’; the way the ‘waiting Jesus with the outstretched arms’ is depicted in the sermons; the description of

⁵ Matchmaking was, and still is, a longstanding practice in the religious and cultural traditions springing from the biblical narrative. I am indebted to Dr Parush R. Parushev for suggesting this term in the context of the church’s mission to the singles, as well as for general conversations and discussions on the topic of this paper.

⁶ An interesting overview of the scarce work in this area can be found in Tony Walter and Grace Davie, ‘The Religiosity of Women in the Modern West’, *British Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 4 (1998), pp. 640-660.

⁷ These appear to be the two major kinds of theories attempting to explain gender differences in religious experience. See Leslie J. Francis and Carolyn Wilcox, ‘Religiosity and Femininity: Do Women Really Hold a More Positive Attitude Toward Christianity?’ *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no.3 (1998), pp. 462-470.

the state of the human heart without Christ and the contrast after accepting him, so often presented in terms of feelings, a language to which women are typically much more responsive.⁸

Yet on a plain level, the church might start by considering some simpler ways. Most successful evangelism happens through genuine personal contacts. Such is the nature of the Kingdom of God; it cannot be transferred into an institutional, programmes-and-results enterprise. Nevertheless, certain programmes and strategies might help to direct personal evangelism in a more effective way. If we are concerned about the lack of believing men in our churches, should we not put some efforts into shaping our vision with this concern in mind? What about looking at the resources available through the existing brothers? Thinking back to my own church, interest in sports is one of the key features many of my brothers share. Why not use this interest more extensively? For some reason this has not been taken seriously as a valuable resource for witness. The church does seem to have resources of which she is not fully aware.

I would add a word of caution here, however. Looking for male converts, just like looking for converts *per se*, should never become a self-oriented and self-serving task. It is right to address the specific problems the church is struggling with, such as the lack of single men, but only in the context of the whole of the Kingdom practice. For the same reason, I would also caution against strong involvement of single women in consciously attracting male converts. People's motives for joining the believing community is often multifactorial, but attracting males predominantly with the prospect of decent wives does not seem to conform to the nature of Kingdom work. Therefore, the church should in some respects do the service for those women. Otherwise, she may run into a whole hotchpotch of very harmful problems. It is with this understanding that we should seek to find ways to evangelise men. It should not be expected that the churches will suddenly be flooded with male converts, yet even some change in the proportion will ease the burden.

But...

But all of these suggestions do not carry enough weight to solve the problem in its essence. Such strategies, even if successful to some extent, will be naturally aimed at young, never-married women. Yet the statistics are merciless. If there are many fewer men in our churches, our women, especially those who are divorced or widowed, will stay unmarried. One of the reasons is that the post-communist society at large also suffers from an

⁸ Richard J. Foster also hints to the problem with churchly evangelistic methods in 'Sexuality and Singleness', David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw, eds., *Readings in Christian Ethics, Volume 2: Issues and Applications* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), p. 165.

imbalance of prospective husbands and prospective wives. A look at a woman's magazine will confirm the frustration of the female part of society, a part that is generally better educated and suffers less from different kinds of destructive addictions, particularly alcoholism. The problem is somewhat more acute in the church, but it is also partly due to the state of a wider society in which there are more 'decent' women ready to take care of the family than 'decent' men.

The time will pass, and our good intentions of socialising and matchmaking will have less and less effect on a woman as she grows older. This is why any matchmaking attempts should go hand in hand with the acknowledgement of the reality of pain which often accompanies involuntary singleness, the pain that, I argue, has to be shared by the congregation. How should the church respond to women living alone and in the believing community? (Note that this is a much more demanding question than that of what the church should teach about singleness.)

Sharing Our Lives: Church as Family

The beginning seems to be right here: addressing the problem, not pretending it is not there nor acting and preaching as if all the single women in our congregation were more than happy to devote their lives exclusively 'for the service to the Lord'. The problem is there, and hiding behind the clichés of the-Lord-always-provides-so-you-should-be-happy will do no good for the health and witness of the church. Unfortunately, the absence of open conversation about the issue is one of the most common complaints heard from single women in the church.⁹

Ignoring the difficulties single women undergo sometimes is coupled with their actual exclusion from or marginalisation in church activities. The reasons are several. For one thing, some churches tend to function as a club for families. The services the church engages in are directed to couples or children. The singles cannot but feel left out. Moreover, in some churches marital status seems to carry great importance in the eyes of the members. A woman who was widowed at the age of 40 has told me her story of working with the church choir director. As an organist, she always had to co-operate with him in preparing for the services. Prior to her husband's death there had never been a problem of the two of them working in a room together. After she became a widow, however, this had suddenly become an issue, especially from the perspective of the director's wife.¹⁰ No

⁹ See, for example, Kristin Aune, *Single Women: Challenge to the Church?* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), pp. 24-25; 46-51; 154. As for my personal experience, I have yet to hear the witness of a single woman who would feel she has received a sufficient and healthy addressing of the issue of singleness in the church.

¹⁰ Personal interview with Respondent C, April 30, 2002, available through the author.

wonder that in such family-oriented churches single women are viewed as a threat by the married female members. The church members alienate a sister who has just become single when she needs their support and fellowship more than ever.

In addition, marital status may be directly connected to the possibilities for ministry in the congregation. A closer look at the marital status of those carrying the largest amounts of responsibility might give a hint to the problem.¹¹ A person's singleness is viewed as immaturity or unfitness for serious involvement in the church, especially as it concerns leadership roles for women (a complicated issue in many Eastern and Central European churches anyway).

If this is the case, it is a very serious accusation: the church distorting its mission of embracing and uniting different social layers and instead turning into a club for families. Assuming the problem is nonexistent and stepping on 'there is no male nor female in Christ' is bad enough, for the church fails to extend substantial help to those in need. Yet the church that singles out singles as incomplete or second-rate members is even more guilty.

The first thing, then, is acknowledging the need for single women to be understood and helped on their own terms. Yet how? Some of them would hurry to say that treating them as 'people with a problem' does not do much good, to say the least: 'Respect! Not pity... It can sometimes feel as though people feel sorry for girls in their late twenties and older who aren't married — what a shame we are still waiting!'¹² Singleness should be welcomed and used creatively and supportively.

What kind of help would be appropriate then? The key issue that I keep hearing from most of my single friends and acquaintances, even though they come from very different contexts, is the support of genuine and intimate friendships. Just like any person, but perhaps even more, single women need 'special' people with whom they can develop a relationship of openness, trust, and vulnerability. The need is even more acute because of the societal pressure which views childlessness and/or the absence of a sexual partner as an abnormality. In the case of crisis, such as divorce or the death of the husband, the need for the friends' support and care also cannot be overestimated:

When my husband left me, claiming he would not live with a Baptist, I was utterly at a loss; I had a two-year old child and a two-dollar stipend from my university... I don't know what I would have done had my mother not

¹¹ 'Sex and the Single Christian: What About the Unmarried in their Post College Years?' An interview with Steve Tracy. *Christianity Today*, July 10, 2000. On-line available. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/008/2.37.html> (April 27, 2002).

¹² Vicky, 28, in Aune, *Single Women*, p. 150.

supported me the way she did. She told me, 'I will be your husband. I will take care of you'. She is a strong woman.¹³

Not many have their mothers so readily available, however. I would go still further: perhaps intimate relationships should not be the responsibility of the biological family. The church has both an enormous task and enormous potential, especially in our current world of broken relationships and bonds. It is from this understanding of the nature of the church that some call for the conscious embodiment of the church as family. This has always been in the theology of the baptistic churches, but, unfortunately, not necessarily in their practice. So, for example, a Mennonite, Miles Zimmerly Wiederkehr has a vision of

not some warm fuzzy sense of family, for which you shop around from church to church... [but of] the practical reality of a church where we are all family, and where we make it work because, no matter what, we are brothers and sisters... We share as peers. We share in parenting. Perhaps we share our living space. Voluntary Service households are examples of Christian households not centered on marriage.¹⁴

Interestingly enough, Rodney Clapp points to the family experience of the early Christians as the key reason for their persecution: '[T]hrough baptism, Eucharist, hospitality and mutual aid, it was, in practice, the believer's first and most fundamental family' and therefore a reason for seeing Christians as jeopardizing the existing social order.¹⁵

We will hardly be persecuted for taking seriously the understanding of church as a family, but we might make a difference within society, at least by witnessing to 'a more excellent way'. This is why throughout this paper I have consciously employed the churchly language of 'brotherhood' and 'sisterhood,' even if it may not fit too well academically. The vision of a new family, a witness of God creating everything new (2 Cor 5:17ff.), besides many other things, can transform the experience of singleness into a common blessing for both single and married, providing an environment

¹³ Personal interview with Respondent D, April 26, 2002, available through the author.

¹⁴ Miles Zimmerly Wiederkehr, 'The Church Is Not Noah's Ark: Singleness in the Church', in Carol Penner, ed., *Women and Men: Gender in the Church* (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1998), p. 105. Another example of an intentional community is that of Karen Schlichting and Aiden Schlichting Enns, who share their household with two other adults ('Living in Our Created Bodies', *ibid.*, p.51). I myself also speak from the experience of living in an intentional community for the last four years. Part of that community consists of three members of my immediate and extended family, but there are a few others (all of them single) related to us only by the bond of common faith.

¹⁵ Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Tradition and Modern Options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 83. Clapp elaborates on Rowan A. Greer, *Broken Lights and Mended Lives* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), pp. 103-4.

of acceptance and support for those especially vulnerable to loneliness and depression.¹⁶

I dream of a community...
 Where each is accepted and cherished,
 loved and loving into being;
 sending and sent
 holding and held
 embracing and embraced
 in blessing.¹⁷

Support and care are very much needed, especially in a time of crisis. Yet this still may be primarily a one-way fellowship, especially if it happens in the context of church services and meetings, rather than an everyday experience of living in an intentional community or regularly sharing life with brothers and sisters in some other more personal way. As time passes and a woman's singleness is accepted as a permanent status, both by the community and herself, other needs become more acute. Kristin Aune has undertaken research on the problems single women encounter in British evangelical churches.¹⁸ Results vary to a great extent; almost any question she has employed in interviewing presents a whole range of responses from absolutely positive to absolutely negative. Yet one reaction is reiterated often: 'Use us!' The need to be needed is crucial. If accepted by others with understanding, love, and gratitude, it alleviates the pain of loneliness and provides the sense of a practically meaningful life.

What other place should be better for a woman to use her talents and gifts than a church? Ideally, the believing community is indeed a unique environment: everybody is acknowledged to have a gift; everybody is encouraged to develop her talents; everybody is needed. We see at least some expressions of this understanding of the Kingdom in any church: there is a choir in which people who otherwise would have never discovered themselves singing enjoy the possibility of serving others through the beauty of music; there is a Sunday School in which the members may find the joy of teaching; there are opportunities for social work that bring a sense of meaningful service. But probably this is not

¹⁶ Seeing church as family necessarily excludes the perversion called megachurches, some of which are appearing in our regions. Even if the members are spending a considerable time in small peer groups, e.g., Bible classes, such a church nevertheless lacks some essential qualities for being a genuine family community reflecting the spirit of the New Testament type of household church. (Cf. Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, pp. 81-82.) The megachurch concept, on the other hand, seems to correspond to the perception of a church competing in the religious market for a consumer's interest, or a church perceived as power — unfortunately, in numbers and/or political weight, not in her moral witness. Dr Parushev has pointed out to me that a more positive way of assessing the role of a megachurch today is to view it as the kin or the village of the biblical past, which still leaves open the question of finding a household church.

¹⁷ An excerpt from a poem written by a single woman, available through the author. I am indebted to Revd Keith G. Jones for suggesting this for the purpose of this paper.

¹⁸ Aune, *Single Women*.

enough. Aune's research, as well as my personal conversations with single sisters, suggests that the church often fails to provide possibilities for meaningful engagement.

Opportunities for serving, coupled with the church's appreciation and support, have a specific application for female members of the congregation. Women, differently from men, are equally (or more) concerned with 'affiliation' as with 'self-enhancement'.¹⁹ They typically draw from their relationships the sense of their personal identity and self-worth, and to ignore the importance of such relationships is to expose the problem of singleness in a most painful way.²⁰ Women commonly

have a much greater and more refined ability to encompass others' needs and to do this with ease... [They] are better geared than men to first recognise others' needs and then to believe strongly that others' needs can be served — that they can respond to others' needs without feeling this as a detraction from their sense of identity. The trouble comes only when women are forced to serve others' needs or when they are expected to do so because it is the 'only thing women are good for'.²¹

If these qualities are recognised as God's gift to be used in the church more fully than before, we might expect some surprising changes in church dynamics.

The Cry of the Body

Since my divorce in 1992, there are times when my hormones rage almost out of control. But since the Bible tells us God wants to be our everything, each night when I crawl into bed, I talk to God as I would an earthly husband... Before I know it, I'm gently rocked to sleep in God's loving arms, no longer aware of my frustrations.²²

All this is very well; but the matter does not end with a fulfilled sense of community. It is already argued that sexual drive is not a primary, virtually uncontrollable force, that the bodily loneliness might be significantly alleviated by emotional satisfaction flowing from the life shared in the believing community. Yet the issue of singleness cannot be separated from a person's need for bodily fulfilment. How should the church address this indispensable area of life?

¹⁹ Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 83.

²⁰ Cf. Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, *A Sense of Sexuality: Christian Love and Intimacy* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 277; Miller, *Toward a New Psychology*, p.83.

²¹ Miller, *Toward a New Psychology*, p. 62. Miller also suggests that coming to terms with one's vital need for relationships is something women can teach men.

²² Maoise L. Palmer, quoted in 'Sex and the Single Girl'. On-line available, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/2001/005/14.92.html> (April 26, 2002).

Previous years of living in the communist system made it somewhat easier to address the problem. Both society and the church downplayed sexual activity. Compare that to the hyper-sexualised culture of today: whether we want it or not, our eyes and ears react to the images and songs which present sexual fulfilment as a must.

On the other hand, in line with the neo-Platonic tradition of viewing sexual activity as sinful or at least inferior to celibacy, together with the communist ideology that worked for suppressing sexual drives, our churches have made out of sexual sin an especially grievous offence. Nevertheless, even in a culture which so downplayed sexual expressions, many things seemed to be going on behind the scenes. They would surface only in the case of a scandal. One can only guess how many lives were lived quietly with some practices that, if disclosed publicly, would not have been accepted by the believing communities.²³ In this way, the churches find themselves living by a double standard: on the one hand, sexual behaviour is strictly codified; on the other hand, practice suggests the problem is not being handled. It should mean that a believing community would do wise to affirm a theology of the bodies that cannot (and should not) escape their sexuality. If the yearning for intimacy, including physical intimacy, should not be denied, how then should it be accepted? Karen Lebacqz suggests expanding the notion of sexuality by seeing it as vulnerability, especially as it pertains to the life of a single believer.²⁴

Such an understanding provides space for a different kind of sexual ethics. A church will have to discern what such rethinking of sexuality would mean for her in practical terms. In the words of Lisa Sowle Cahill,

Community is affirmed in a manner that entails rather than denigrates the value of the person. In the correlative sexual ethics, sexual acts express conversion to or alienation from the community; this is especially true in the New Testament, where any legalistic approach to sexual morality is abandoned without abandonment of the idea that the moral lives of individuals do make a difference to the life of the community as a whole, and their inclusion in it.²⁵

²³ I am not aware of any statistics that would reflect the struggles with 'sexual sin' in the churches in post-communist Europe and can ground the statement only on my personal observations. However, the matching data from other cultures makes it difficult to doubt the ongoing vigorous dynamics of various sexual issues under the surface of silence in the churches. See, for example, Kevin Miller, 'What Pastors Are Saying'. On-line available, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/leaders/newsletter/2001/cln11205.html> (May 6, 2002); Haddon Robinson, 'CT Classic: Sex, Marriage, and Divorce: Results From a 1992 Christianity Today Reader's Survey.' On-line available – <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/135/45.0.html> (May 7, 2002).

²⁴ 'Appropriate Vulnerability', in Clark and Rakestraw, *Readings in Christian Ethics*, pp. 149-154.

²⁵ *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 141-142.

A believing community therefore will hold certain limitations for sexual expression. That necessarily will result in some sort of suffering for those deprived of sexual fulfilment. If we acknowledge suffering to be present, this raises another important question. Consciously choosing one's way of suffering is very different from the disappointment that comes after years of waiting for the fulfilment of God's plan. This is especially relevant, but not limited, to the church's evangelistic message. The church can preach the good news in a light that presents a potential convert's life as the fulfilment of all the expectations generally upheld by secular society: success in one's career, a supportive community of friends (in this case, the church), and, of course, all possible blessings in one's family life. God is perceived as an answer to commonly accepted major human needs. He is indeed that; a small problem, however, is that he typically chooses to answer those needs in ways quite different from our perception. Hence the understanding of suffering as an inseparable part of the Christian life, confirmed by the biblical witnesses as well as the two thousand years' experience of the followers of Jesus.

Forced singleness, i.e., singleness that comes 'in the package' of being a Christian in a specific setting characterised by a minority of male Christians, is perhaps one of the most acute expressions of suffering on the existential level, and, as such, should be addressed with proper attention. It is a part of the Christian experience that, paradoxically, may bring many positive fruits.²⁶ By this I do not intend to suggest consoling our single sisters with such an idea; it would be cheap if not sinister. However, if the church upholds a theology of suffering as a normative experience, it will, by implication, have an effect on the single female believers' perception of their situation.

The churches of our region might have been more successful in this matter during the years of the communist regime. My own mother and her two sisters became Christians being aware of the probable price of their decision: no prospect of a good career, harassment in the work place, the possibility of a closer acquaintance with the KGB, and — possibly — absence of marriage. For my aunts, the latter has been a reality of life. Now, on the other hand, a woman freely and publicly professing her faithfulness to Jesus seems to have an incredible faith as she faces a congregation, 70 per cent of which is female, and still believes God has chosen a husband for her. At this particular time and setting at least, forsaking one's dreams of family is a very possible price for joining Jesus' community. In some way, then, our churches function similarly to the

²⁶ For an extended discussion on the role of suffering in the Christian life, see my previous work, 'The Suffering Faith: Towards a Theology of Suffering in the Context of the Lithuanian Baptist Church' (Unpublished thesis, Klaipėda: Lithuania Christian College, 2001). Available through the author.

monastic communities in the wider context of the Catholic or Orthodox church environment: they are a result of a voluntary and conscious choice of serving God while renouncing certain goods which would be (more) available otherwise. If this is the picture a new female convert is presented with, her experience of singleness in the future will be accepted as an agreed expression of suffering which travelling the Way requires, not a bitter disappointment in God's leading and his 'will.'

Singleness and Marriage: Finding Our Lives In God and Through Each Other

Lastly, what also needs to be rethought in connection with the understanding of suffering is the idealisation of the family. Just as with the prospect of marriage for the new female converts, we are so often presented with an untruthful story of success, which, besides other things, reinforces the concept of marriage as a means to total fulfilment and personal happiness. Yet it does not take much time to learn from experience that for many Christian families the commitment of being together is a continuous or intermittent struggle. In this way, all of us, married and single alike, are in need of a community which can serve as a voice pointing out to us our failures and encouraging us towards a positive change, supplementing and fulfilling our needs as social beings, and consoling us in our suffering. In this way, a biological family 'is enriched when it is decentered, relativized, recognized as less than an absolute'.²⁷ One of the aspects of such understanding for Rodney Clapp, quoted above, is the singles' participation in the parenting of the children of their brothers and sisters in Christ.²⁸ (We might add to that the participation in the care for unwanted children, the product of rabid sexuality of society at large.)

Both marriage and singleness are a vocation with the particular limitations they each present.²⁹ The question for us as believers will be, are we sensitive and wise enough to see each situation as a blessing? 'Indeed, it is our very conditions and limitations that turn us from fantasy and self-pity to the genuine freedom to be found in the actual circumstances of our lives... To be free is to accept and respect the right limitations... [T]he single Christians in our midst are among the most faithful and powerful witnesses of this truth...' ³⁰

²⁷ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, p. 86. Clapp puts it in a striking way: a sentimental biological family which demands absolute allegiance is in fact destructive for Christians. In this way, these Christians 'are likely to be seen as traitors and outsiders. Jesus' words about coming with a sword to divide families will be painfully real to them'. (p. 87).

²⁸ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, p. 107.

²⁹ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, p. 112.

³⁰ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, p. 113.

Conclusion

Christian life, whether in singleness or marriage, may not be easy, and at times perhaps very difficult. The fight might be strenuous, for it involves suffering, both existential and corporate. We will be required to swim against the stream of the cultural elevation of individual needs, and especially of unconstrained sexual gratification.

As a church, we should take seriously the needs and gifts of those sisters who are single because of the circumstances, not by choice. One concern is to look for resources to provide them with some more possibilities of marriage. Yet the direction our societies are taking indicates that the church should expect to have more and more single women in future years. Surely, existential suffering will come into the picture, but there is hope. If the church is sensitive enough to the particular needs of her single sisters, both relational and sexual, if she extends hospitality to all those in need of fellowship,³¹ the members of the Body — both single and married, each with their peculiar life story — will find much joy in growing together and participating in the work of the Kingdom.

I dream of a community...
 ...which is still journeying
 and does not think it has arrived
 but is committed to the quest
 and in the Spirit dances on.
 I dream...³²

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³¹ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, p. 156.

³² See n.17.

MISSIONAL CHURCHES: IDENTICAL GLOBAL ‘PLANTS’ OR LOCALLY GROWN ‘FLOWERS’?

Christian A. Schwarz’s ‘Natural Church Development’ revisited

Church development and the search for renewal

Recent practical-theological research has paid a lot of attention to a relatively new discipline under its ‘umbrella’: church development. The discipline was developed as a result of the ecclesiological shift from the ministry of the pastor to the church.¹ The functioning of the community of faith in society has become a top priority on the practical-theological agenda. The church is in crisis and attempts are being made to overcome this crisis. From this perspective church development can be seen as a discipline that acts in the tension between the ‘ideal church’ and the ‘factual church’. As such it works on the assumption that the quality of the life of the community can be improved in a way that will lead to a recovery and stimulus of the community’s role in mission and evangelism² in a given specific context. It is a ‘programme of hope’.

Church development focuses on the development of missional churches, and functions primarily as a theological theory concerning the initiation and guidance of processes in the community of faith. These processes are oriented towards the functioning of the community in a given context in accordance with her calling as it has been understood through Scripture and related to her collective identity. The different theoretical and theological theories have led, in recent years, to various approaches to church-development.³ Crucial in all the approaches is the underlying ecclesiology.⁴ Every approach has its own representatives.

In this article we will look at one of the evangelistic⁵ approaches that has been very influential: Natural Church Development.⁶ This approach has

¹ Which is also related to the fact that the institutional church lost her plausibility structures.

² Basically we need to discern between church development as (1) a practical-theological theory, (2) a strategy of church renewal, (3) the actual developmental work and (4) the result of the developmental work.

³ E.g. the worship approach, the functional approach, the missionary (ecumenical) approach, the evangelistic approach, the double-strategy and the conciliar approach. Compare J.Hendriks, *Praktische Theologie* 22 (5) (Waanders: Kampen, 1995), p.635-646. Also: R. Strunk, *Vertrauen*. Grundzüge einer Theologie des Gemeindeaufbaus (Stuttgart, 1989).

⁴ R.Erwich, *Het gaat om mensen*. Een exploratief onderzoek naar het functioneren van gemeentebouwprocessen in drie Baptistengemeenten (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1999).

⁵ In order not to confuse the term with missionary in the sense of ecumenical (Hoekendijk: ‘church for others’) we have chosen the term ‘evangelistic’.

gained much attention in the last ten years and has been developed by the German author, Christian A. Schwarz.⁷

Natural Church Development as a model⁸

In his understanding of the church, Schwarz introduces the term ‘polarity’. He holds the view that this term is characteristic of the creation of God. He sees it as a law: the law of polarity means that every force is connected to a counterforce. The two poles (force and counterforce) mutually attract each other and this creates space for what he calls ‘biotic potential’. Using the ecological point of view, Schwarz defines this biotic potential as ‘the inherent possibility of an organism to reproduce itself’.⁹ Schwarz is strongly convinced that this principle can be applied to the church. We cannot ‘make’ the church, but we can create the space for the ‘biotic potential’ God has put into the church. The most important thing to do is to remove or reduce those factors which block or slow down the growth of the church. According to Schwarz, this law of polarity can be seen in the two shapes of the church: the dynamic and the static. Looking at the graph of this concept overleaf we see the following.¹⁰ The dynamic shape produces organisational structures and these stimulate the dynamic pole. A healthy church lives with this balance. Schwarz states that the practice of many churches is that the institutional side of the church gets too much emphasis or the dynamic side of the church gets too much emphasis.

One-sided static thinking is represented in the technocratic model¹¹: ‘safety above all else’ is the psychological drive behind everything. The external shapes and institutions are almost a guarantee for mediation of salvation (e.g. Eucharist, reading of the Bible etc.). Perform this liturgy in this specific way and the ‘holy Spirit will immediately descend on the church’. Schwarz states that the consequences of this approach are obvious: dogmatism, fundamentalism, legalism, sacramentalism etc.

⁶ We will use the abbreviation NCD in the article to denote this approach.

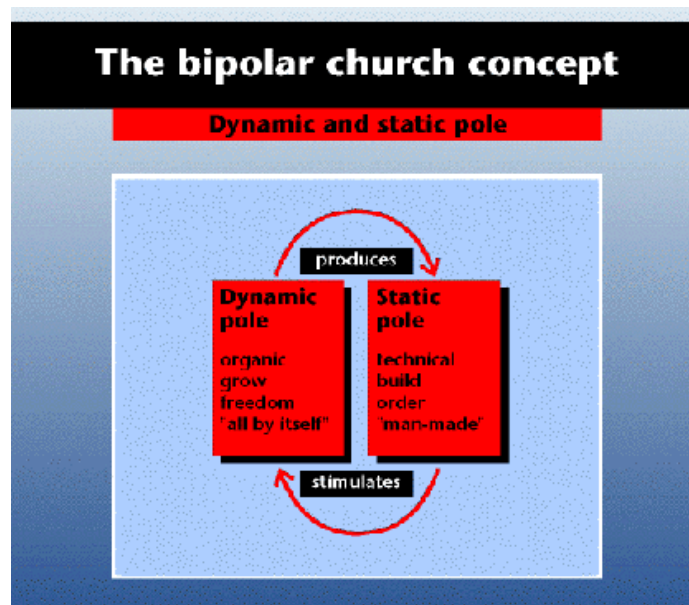
⁷ Schwarz has written many publications (of which some have been translated into English) starting in the early 1990s: *Praxis des Gemeindeaufbaus* (1987); *Der Gabentest* (1988); *Der Gemeindetest* (1991); *Die Dritte Reformation* (1993, English translation: *Paradigm Shift in the church*, 1999); *Natural Church Development* (1996).

⁸ For this overview we have used: C. A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development. A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream: Church Smart, 1996); and C. A. Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church: How Natural Church Development Can Transform Theological Thinking* (Carol Stream: Church Smart, 1999).

⁹ *Natural Church Development*, p.8ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.84.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.89.



One-sided dynamic thinking is represented in the spiritualistic model¹²: it creates a split between spiritual and material, or between spirit and matter. The two poles are separated and basically there is no longer a connection, they are played off against each other. The institutional pole is rejected as unspiritual. The theological fruits are clear: relativism, spiritualism, docetism, individualism, quietism etc. What is NCD? Natural church development means that both poles are constantly connected to each other. The institutional pole of the church has to correspond with God's principles in a way that enables the dynamic or organic pole to grow. The basic question now is: how can we create the space that is needed to help the church grow? How can we take the factors away which slow down or reduce the growth of the church? More specifically: how can we create space for the growth automatisms God has put into the church? Schwarz has several answers. He defined them in five building 'blocks': (1) the eight quality characteristics; (2) the minimum strategy; (3) the biotic principle; (4) a new theological model¹³ and finally (5) the ten action steps.¹⁴ Since the first three form the heart of the model (the last one is the outline for a strategy), we will concentrate on these first three.

¹² Ibid., p.91.

¹³ In a nutshell already described above. For more background on this compare *Paradigm Shift in the Church*.

¹⁴ I will present the outlined overall strategy in a footnote after describing the model as such.

1 The Eight Quality Characteristics¹⁵

In his research Schwarz looked for an answer to whether there are certain quality characteristics that are more developed in growing churches than in non-growing churches? On the basis of his research¹⁶ he found that there were eight characteristics present in growing churches.

1. **Empowering leadership:** Schwarz found that leaders of growing churches concentrate on equipping other Christians. They teach, support and motivate others. They invest in discipleship, delegate work instead of taking all the work on their shoulders. This principle is about multiplication of energy and creating and sustaining a larger network of people who can do the work. It is about mobilising people.
2. **Gift-oriented ministry:** Ministry tasks are not given on the basis of availability, but on the basis of Spirit-given gifts, which need to be discerned and developed. Applying this in the church will result in a larger group of people who work on the basis of their giftedness.
3. **Passionate spirituality:** Faith is not a matter of duty or rules only. The growth of a church (in quality and quantity) is related to a passionate spirituality. This characteristic is about the intensively experienced relationship with Jesus Christ. It is about loving Christ and experiencing this in worship, prayer and action.
4. **Functional structures:** According to Schwarz, many people feel that talking about structures is unspiritual. He questions the functionality of structures: to what extent are the structures enabling a better self-organisation of the church and to what extent do they help the church to effectively accomplish her mission?
5. **Inspiring worship:** Another important characteristic relates to the quality of worship (in the church). Growing churches show a high quality of worship (not only in terms of a seeker-sensitive service). Worship can be organised in an inspiring way, which comforts and challenges people.
6. **Holistic small groups:** Small groups are amongst the most important factors for growth of the church nowadays; groups in which people study the Bible, pray, share and serve others. In this context discipleship becomes fleshed out.
7. **Need-oriented evangelism:** We need to discern between methods of evangelism and principles of evangelism. Churches need to support those with the gift of evangelism and stimulate them to evangelise.

¹⁵ *Natural Church Development*, p.16ff.

¹⁶ More about this research after the overview of Schwarz's model.

Schwarz (and others) have pointed out that approximately 10% of believers have this gift. They should not be burdened with loads of other church work but set free to develop their ministry. At the same time Schwarz points out that we should focus on 'where people are', on their needs (this is something different from taking these needs as the absolute).

- 8. Loving relationships:** Growing churches have a high score on the quality of relationships. The climate of relationships can be determined as a loving atmosphere in which people really live with each other with the love of Christ. The church radiates this love into the neighbourhood.

On the basis of his world-wide research Schwarz concludes that none of the characteristics should be missing if a particular church is to be healthy and growing. Based on an analysis of a church profile the church's quality index can be measured. Schwarz claims that if a church has a score of 65 or higher it is likely that this church is growing.

The model holds a qualitative¹⁷ starting point: improving the quality of the eight characteristics will have quantitative consequences. The claim of this model is therefore that whenever quantitative results 'stay away' this is an indicator of qualitative problems. How do we start working with this model? Schwarz emphasises that we need to work with the minimum factor. This will lead to a specific strategy, called the minimum strategy.

2 The minimum strategy¹⁸

The starting point of this strategy is that the weakest of the eight quality characteristics blocks the growth of the church the most. Schwarz claims that paying more attention to these weak 'chains' will contribute to a further growth of the church. The minimum factor is not more important than the other quality characteristics. Basically we have to work on all factors at the same time, but every church can have a different minimum factor. In one church it may be the leadership, in other churches it may be the kind of evangelism etc.

Schwarz develops the minimum strategy and takes insights from agriculture. The German biologist and chemist von Liebig discovered that crops need four minerals to grow: nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus and potassium. The growth stops when one of these is missing. The crop will grow again when more manure is used. Von Liebig discovered the 'law of the minimum'. Over-fertilisation will pollute the fields and will decrease

¹⁷ This is the term Schwarz uses.

¹⁸ *Natural Church Development*, p.50.

the harvest. Schwarz sees here an analogy with the life of the church and applies these findings. In the graph below the strategy would be to use the strong characteristic (i.e. small groups) to work on the weak areas (i.e. structures and evangelism).



3 The biotic principles¹⁹

The third element or building block in Schwarz's model is specifically focused on creating space for 'growth automatisms'. Schwarz introduces six 'biotic principles', principles that create space for reproduction. He states that he developed these principles, not by research, but simply by observing nature.

1. Networking (structured interdependence)

The first principle focuses on the importance of networking. The church of Christ can be compared to a complex organism in which all the parts and segments are related to each other. When applied to the eight quality characteristics Schwarz has presented it means that when a church works on 1 of the 8, not only does the quality of the 1 characteristic the people are working on improve, but this also impacts the other 7. For example, an improvement on the 'gift-oriented ministry' factor will lead to an impact on leadership.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.62ff.

2. Multiplication

The principle of multiplication is also important for church development. If we apply it, for example, to house groups it means that a house group should be creating more house groups, not as a means in itself, but as a principle of reaching more people with the Gospel. This happens in church planting when a house group grows and starts another group in a different location (further growth can be achieved by creating similar units).

3. Conversion of energy

This principle is about using destructive energy in productive ways. Imagine a surfer who is balancing just under a wave. He makes optimal use of the power of the water to move forward and to enjoy the surfing. He is not fighting the water, but instead he is using the power and converting it into energy to enable him to move on the board.

4. Multi-usage

The heart of this principle means that effort is converted into energy that will benefit the continuation of the work. Church leaders should make use of co-leaders. The invested energy in a person will be used in a plural way, in a group and later by the trained co-leader in other contexts.

5. Symbiosis

In the development of the church it is very important to make sure that different people work together. When everyone works with the gifts he or she has, this will create a high level of teamwork, people mutually enriching each other. There is no need for competition. There should be a symbiosis of spiritual gifts according to Schwarz.

6. Functionality

This is an often overlooked principle. Characteristic to all life forms is that they bear fruit in one way or another. The nature of this 'fruit' is to maintain the 'sort'. In the NT Jesus refers to this when he says: 'A good tree will bring forth good fruit' (Matthew 7,17). In terms of church development there are two questions to ask: what is the quality of the eight areas and how is growth and multiplication developing?

Schwarz assigns biotic elements to all the eight quality characteristics. The adjectives he uses for these characteristics are crucial in the development of the church. He speaks about empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism and finally loving relationships. These adjectives focus on creating space for growth automatisms. The

overall strategy, in nine action steps, functions as the larger framework in which the above mentioned elements receive their place.²⁰

Schwarz's model, as already stated, has received much attention in recent years. Several Baptist Unions within the European Baptist Federation context have either used the model, are using it or have been working with elements of it with different degrees of satisfaction.²¹ The work of Schwarz has become known through many of his publications but primarily through *Natural Church Development* books, and not only in Europe. Recently conferences were held in the US and Canada. Schools, such as Fuller Theological Seminary, have accepted it into their curriculum and work with the principles. Schwarz is the first to have conducted world-wide research on valid principles. Looking at the eight quality characteristics he presents, there is a feel of recognition, and many work with them simply on this basis. It presents a neat overview of the quality of life of the church. His bipolar church concept is also interesting and has proven to be helpful (though it is very schematic) in the analysis of mutually opposing forces in the churches.²² The concerns we share in the rest of this article are in no way final but are provisional attempts to continue the necessary reflection in shaping a practical theological theory for church development. Most approaches and models are too focused on the 'how-to' level or strategy without being seriously accountable for the underlying assumptions and methodology.

Methodological concerns

First of all, there are some questions concerning the empirical basis of NCD and its methodology. For a long time Schwarz did not give any information as to the scientific methods that were used in his research but basically related to the procedures by which he found the eight quality characteristics. Schwarz conducted his research in 1000 churches in 32 countries worldwide. In a 1999 publication by Christoph Schalk (a research assistant) entitled '*Organizational Diagnosis of Churches - The statistical development of the 'Natural Church Development' Survey and its Relation to Organizational Psychology*',²³ Schwarz gives some insight into the complex research realities of NCD. While the theological backing takes

²⁰ These steps are: 1) Strengthen the spiritual motivation (basis); 2) Determine the minimum factor; 3) Define qualitative targets; 4) Map obstacles (spiritualistic/institutionalistic); 5) Apply biotic principles; 6) Use the strengths of the church; 7) Check the progress (positive and negative developments); 8) Pay attention to other new minimum factors; 9) Plant a new church. *Natural Church Development*, p.106ff.

²¹ It was one of the themes of the Baltic States Conference (a regular conference on church renewal for the Nordic countries) and also of the Home Mission Secretaries Conference (organised annually by the EBF Mission and Evangelism Division).

²² Spiritualistic versus technocratic thinking.

²³ Initially written as a Master's thesis by Schalk for the University of Würzburg.

place in *Paradigm Shift in the Church*, this first publication shows the statistical research and findings of the process. Schwarz's model rests upon 'planned change'²⁴ strategies as used in organisational development.²⁵ Organisational psychology, which is at the heart of this, examines and develops the behaviour of people in a specific organisation. It focuses strongly on the relationships between the tasks of the organisation and the individuals. Diagnosis of an organisation is the necessary prerequisite for enabling adequate interventions in the organisation itself.²⁶ Schalk introduces the phenomenological approach as the basis for the church profile that is used in NCD. Starting from the assumption that the organisation and its structure are created by individual members, the church profile by which data gathering takes place works with this idea.²⁷ The role of the perceptions of the church members is big. Their perceptions are explanations of their behaviour and become, as such, normative. From the start this seems to be a risky approach.²⁸ Since the goal is to measure the quality of life of the church, the question is whether this can be achieved by sole analysis of the insider perspective. This is even more endangered by the fact that only thirty members and a pastor receive a questionnaire. Of course, this may not be a problem in a small church but it might be in a larger church. It is also not clear what kind of selection takes place (and who selects) in order to find these thirty members: what is their relationship to the church, are they the core and key members of the church, or are they nominal members or possibly even absentees? Is there an outsider perspective?

Schalk explains extensively the 'empirical development' of the NCD survey.²⁹ At the heart of it is the development of the questionnaire used for the Church Profile. The current questionnaire went through several revisions and he admits that:

'interim versions were developed on the basis of theological suppositions and knowledge in church growth and then tested again and again – initially not according to scientific criteria. Since the work of the Institute for Natural Church Development – founded in the 80s – was originally theologically oriented, the need for a sociologically and scientifically based survey was only realized in the course of time. In 1993 the questionnaire became

²⁴ This approach was developed in the early 1950s by Lewin who was highly interested in processes of change in groups. Later Lewin's work was further refined. In terms of the use of it in church development there is a lot of discussion. In the late 1960s 'planned change' was abandoned. Expected results did not come and the emphasis changed from structures to the climate of the organisations.

²⁵ Schalk, *Organizational Diagnosis of Churches*, p.5ff.

²⁶ Ibid., p.6.

²⁷ Ibid., p.7, experiences of the members and p.11. The fact that only questionnaires are being used and not a wider variety of instruments is questionable, basically because of recent emphasis on combinations of quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to stress validity of methods.

²⁸ It is not without reason that external coaches have been suggested to guide the developmental process.

²⁹ Ibid., p.17ff.

scientific within several phases and was revised on the basis of the classical test theory so that today it satisfies recognized criteria like reliability and validity.’³⁰

This explanation leaves several serious issues to be dealt with. First of all, we have no insight into the different stages of the questionnaire, only the different subsequent studies.³¹ Further, it seems likely there was a correction after initial results, but again this is not traceable. Further research was done on an inadequate basis.³² Several other authors have voiced these concerns even more critically.³³ Schalk presents the results of the older research in his *Organizational Development* and gives the following reason for it:

‘The reason why only this ‘old’ data is presented here, but not the results of the follow-up studies, is simple: The data of the international samples gathered in the follow-up studies is used for the computing of the church profiles and for the standardization of these profiles. Since this part of our research has been financed privately (while our first study was financed by the University of Würzburg), and since the sale of the church profiles is the only way for the Institute for Natural Church Development to finance the high costs for research, these data are ‘protected knowledge’ which isn’t publicly accessible’.³⁴

The explanation speaks for itself: you can simply claim empirical validity for specific research and define certain data related to the results as protected knowledge. It might also be biased, but since there is no clear explanation of the relationship between Scripture, normal observation (principles from nature and biology) and empirical research (the dominance of the last is quite obvious), it seems like preconceived theory is in the process of being validated by after-research.³⁵ This is not a problem in principle, but it becomes a problem when research is not transparent. One of the key rules for this kind of research is provision of data and procedures to the extent that the research can be repeated.

³⁰ Ibid., p.17.

³¹ Ibid., p.17. An initial survey of the data of 334 respondents in 14 German churches, while 134 churches were researched for a certain aspect (which?), another survey of data of 3624 respondents in 201 German churches served to verify the results of the first survey. Finally data of 34314 respondents out of 32 countries from 1188 churches were analysed.

³² In his book *Natural Church Development*, p.19 Schwarz refers to the international project as the 5th phase in a series of surveys and states that though the initial methodology had to improve in many respects, many insights were gained for developing further research. It is not clear what kind of results he is referring to.

³³ J. Ellas and F. Yeakley (1999), *Natural Church Development*. In *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*. Volume 9, Spring 1999.

³⁴ Schalk, *Organizational Development*, p.17.

³⁵ Compare the introduction about the empirical development of the NCD survey, Schalk, p.17. Compare also an even more critical comment on this by W. M. Carroll (1999), *A Theological and Methodological Analysis of Natural Churchdevelopment*. (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, available through the author).

The goal of Schalk's study was to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaires used by Schwarz in the Church Profile.³⁶ A brief explanation here is necessary in order to understand the ideas of NCD. Schalk explains the composition of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of eight scales (the eight quality characteristics). Related to every scale the respondents have to answer a specific set of questions by rating them on a 5 or a 3 to 6 point scale. From the goal-oriented pastor (later empowering leadership) to need-oriented evangelism, every scale had to be scored on several items. Schalk developed four hypotheses³⁷ that had to be verified to test the validity of the questionnaire. On the basis of the results of this initial testing, the first hypothesis is partially falsified and urges the improvement of the questionnaire.³⁸ It is clear that the correlation between the eight scales and the questions is too low. A similar partial verification is presented towards the second hypothesis. The third hypothesis testing shows even worse results.³⁹ It seems that the internal consistency of the scales is too low for reliable statements about the quality of church life. Schalk thus rejects this hypothesis. The final hypothesis was confirmed by the results. Interestingly, 'growing' is defined as 'an increase in the number of worship service attenders by at least ten per cent within the last 5 years'.⁴⁰ On the basis of these results Schalk decided that improvement of the questionnaire was desirable and he designed a 4-step strategy to achieve this.⁴¹ The new 'interim' questionnaire was tested however on a much smaller population.⁴² The outcome of the new analysis showed overall higher reliability compared to the first but the differences are not

³⁶ Schalk, *op.cit.*, p.18 ff.

³⁷ Schalk, *ibid.*, p.18ff. The first hypothesis served to test whether the assumed relation between the 8 scales and the questions (items) can be verified. The second hypothesis served to test the validity of the 8 scales (quality characteristics) and the relationship between the theoretical background of the survey and the empirical findings. The third hypothesis served to test the validity of the questionnaire related to the 8 quality characteristics. The fourth and final hypothesis served to test the validity of the findings related to separate growing churches from non-growing churches. For further details about the procedures for measurement I refer to Schalk's writings, p.19-21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.27.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.21. It seems that adherents of NCD are not always aware of this definition of growth. I believe this is one way to go, but there may be other perspectives on growth, certainly in a Baptist context.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.35.

⁴² This time the criterion that respondents had to belong to a church was not taken into account, which secures a wider sample. (Schalk, p.36).

overwhelmingly convincing. I do agree with Carroll⁴³ that the scores (concerning the validity of the relationship between the eight quality characteristics and the questions in the questionnaire) need to be much higher. A fair relationship between characteristics and questions is proved here, but the question that remains is, does the questionnaire really measure what it claims? I am not at all sure.

Three final comments before we move to theological concerns. The first is about the translation of the questionnaire into different languages, which was done for the benefit of research in different contexts. Schwarz should be praised for his translation attempts, but how has the questionnaire's translation been embedded in the specific cultural contexts⁴⁴ and values. Secondly, I wonder whether the terminology⁴⁵ used in the questionnaire and in the further aspects of the model are too much of a barrier for people. Thirdly, is the terminology too complex, affecting the results of the church profile which focuses on the quality of church life. There seems to be an internal tension in the research: people have to work with terminology they do not 'master' and therefore the impact on the results is not clear.

My final comment relates to the first of these three, in wondering whether there wouldn't be other factors that could be of great importance in determining the quality of church life. We could think of local and national factors, and issues of finance, gender and age-group. I am impressed by Peter Kaldor's research in Australia with a team of scholars to determine characteristics of vital congregations. In this research many more aspects are taken into account to measure the health of a local church. These range from the church's size to the perception of activities, from willingness to deal with hard issues to involvement in decision making, from stages in life to attitude towards the Bible, from the approach to preaching to the

⁴³ W. M. Carroll (1999), *A Theological and Methodological Analysis of Natural Church Development*. (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, available through the author). Carroll writes: 'Schwarz claims that the church profile has a very high reliability rating as mentioned above. Reliability in psychological statistics refers to the consistency and repeatability of the measurements of the test. Thus respondents taking the church profile repeatedly should score the same each time by the same observed criteria: the more identical the repeated scores, the more reliable the measurement test. Schwarz states that the rating between 0.75 and 0.89 are very high values. The rule of thumb for statistical reliability, however, is a minimum of 0.80 with preferred scores between 0.95 to 0.99 reliability'. P.11. Carroll is not mild in his further criticism. Schwarz is said to have a mono-method bias in assuming that all churches would operate the same way and projects one model of the perfect church. The research suffers from 'hypothesis guessing' because, according to Carroll, respondents have already been exposed to the eight quality characteristics before they start answering the questions in the questionnaire. P.12 ff.

⁴⁴ Compare as well Ellas/Yeakley and Carroll.

⁴⁵ E.g. Biotic principle, bipolar church concept, monistic thinking, and several questions from the questionnaire.

approach to leadership style.⁴⁶ This would of course influence the composition of a questionnaire. A quantitative approach has led to the identification of qualities! Do we really ‘catch’ the qualities?

Theological and Missiological concerns

Some of the theological concerns have been mentioned before: has Schwarz neutralized the institutional shape of the church since all the emphasis is on its organic shape, and related to this: what is theologically the role of functional structures in his model? Is his biblical-theological basis far too thin while his model rests upon highly normative data?⁴⁷ More recently commentators have pointed out that Schwarz stays too much with the inherited modes of the church, instead of looking for new ways of being church.⁴⁸ Others contend that Schwarz uses a dualistic view of Scripture in which the biblical canon is opposed to God’s word.⁴⁹ His image is of a God who is transcendent and who has ‘deposited’ all the instruments and principles apart from himself to such an extent that He is no longer needed.⁵⁰ We only need to be aware of ‘growth-automatisms’. I am not sure that this is fair and sustainable criticism. One of the main criticisms (and maybe the last critical note fits into this context) came from the Church Growth Movement itself. In the journal, ASCG⁵¹, authors like Simpson refer to the fact that Schwarz did not credit the Church Growth Movement from which he received so much in his own development. In fact Simpson accuses Schwarz more or less of creating a juxtaposition between NCD and (the) Church Growth (Movement).⁵² It is a known fact that many of the characteristics Schwarz used and developed circled around, for example, the work of C. Peter Wagner.

I would like to concentrate, however, on the first of the two major theological concerns, and this brings us back to the title of this article. What kind of churches do we want to develop – global ‘plants’ or locally grown ‘flowers’? Of course this question may sound a little over the top but at the heart of it is a serious issue. I strongly believe Schwarz’s model does

⁴⁶ P. Kaldor (ed.), *Shaping A Future*. Characteristics of vital congregations. (Melbourne: Openbook Publishers, 1997). In presenting the results of the nationwide church survey, Kaldor presents (p.11) a full list of aspects of congregational life.

⁴⁷ R. Erwich, *Het gaat om mensen*. Een exploratief onderzoek naar het functioneren van gemeenteopbouwprocessen in drie Baptistengemeenten. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1999), pp231-233, 249-251.

⁴⁸ <http://www.evangelism.uk.net>. I believe this is, amongst others, a fair comment. Church is constrained within certain current church structures, which have become highly debatable under the influence of postmodern thinking. The writers refer to Schwarz’s model in terms of improving the inherited mode rather than discerning new ways of being church, the emerging mode.

⁴⁹ Carroll, op.cit., p.4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.5.

⁵¹ Journal of *The American Society for Church Growth*.

⁵² D. Simpson, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*. (Book review in ASCG, Fall 1998).

not provide us with sufficient attention for the context in which churches find themselves. It may not look difficult to copy a perfect 'model church', but there are enough examples of attempts to 'copy' Willow Creek or Saddle Back churches that failed. Can we simply strip all these models of their specific local and cultural flavour and pick out the principles we need? Schwarz would definitely answer this question in a positive way. He contends that, based on his worldwide research, he has found universally applicable principles. Though churches may look different, the principles are the same. I would strongly argue against this position. I believe we need to develop local 'flowers' and use principles, but contextualize them on the basis of a thorough analysis of the relationship between the culture and the Gospel. Schwarz gives the impression that he has developed the definitive list of church growth principles.⁵³ In doing so he proves to be deeply embedded in a modernist perspective. In the postmodern context there is hardly any room for universal systems: the eternal Word speaks in the voice of the local⁵⁴ dialect. The fact that we find ourselves in this cultural condition, with many shifts, has to make us think without losing the essentials of the Gospel.⁵⁵ I am deeply convinced that we need to develop a contextual church development theology. The question is whether Schwarz could correct this in his model. Probably more local factors would need to be taken into account. I agree with Gibbs and Coffey when they write that we need to move from 'generic congregations', ('high-profile churches', product of converging factors) to 'incarnational communities' (churches engaging critically and dynamically with the culture in which they are immersed).⁵⁶ Drawing from our Baptist heritage and tradition it is possible to develop local missional churches.

The second major theological concern is related to what Lois Y. Barrett has called the 'why' and the 'what' of the church.⁵⁷ Describing the current context in which the Church Growth Movement has emerged she contends that:

⁵³ Ibid., p.63.

⁵⁴ Which does not only refer to 'one city' but also to an 'area' or 'region' or even to 'national culture' as far as it exists, but in contextual theology the unique characteristics of the local environment are taken into account.

⁵⁵ The shifts could be defined as: from 'general' to 'local', from 'timeless' to 'timely', from 'written' to 'oral' and from 'universal' to 'particular'. Compare: S. Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990). Also: E. Gibbs and I. Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Leicester: IVP, 2001), especially chapter 1, 'From living in the past to engaging with the present'. And: P. G. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World*. (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1999).

⁵⁶ Gibbs/Coffey, op.cit., Chapter 9, p.211ff.

⁵⁷ Lois Y. Barrett, *Marks of the Faithful Church – Marks of the Successful Church: A Response to Natural Church Development from a Missiological and Ecclesiological Perspective*. AEC 1999 Conference organised by New Life Ministries (Mennonites).

The article can be found at http://www.newlifeministries-nlm.org/online/aec99_barrett.htm

‘Without many people realizing it, the question had changed. Instead of asking the question, "What are the marks of the true church?" now many people were asking, "What are the marks of the successful church or the growing church?" Now, in the modern era, the marks became not New Testament images and metaphors of peoplehood or creedal statements about the nature of the church but principles for being successful. The big question had changed from who or what to how.’

For Barrett this is the starting point for her evaluation of NCD. She believes the eight quality characteristics are not embedded deeply enough in interaction with the key themes of the Bible.⁵⁸ ‘Overlooking’ the key missional themes in the Bible leads, according to Barrett, to an overemphasis on the ‘how’, instead of zooming in on ‘what’ and ‘why’. Though I would not agree totally with Barrett, I do feel a lot of sympathy. Indeed, Barrett had no access to *Paradigm Shift in the Church*, which had been translated a little later, in which Schwarz writes about some of his theological assumptions. Still the heart of the criticism is serious. NCD needs a more solid biblical basis but without compromise and on the basis of sound hermeneutical principles. In another article,⁵⁹ Tom Yoder Neufeld deals with a comparison of NCD and New Testament data. His criticism is modest and in fact he is very supportive of many of the quality characteristics.⁶⁰ At the same time he is aware that his position is quite reactive. His comments focus mainly on some aspects of five of the eight quality characteristics. Concerning gift-oriented ministry he comments that Schwarz leaves the ‘door open to a variety of models of gift discernment’. The quality characteristic ‘loving relationships’ he clearly finds lacking depth in terms of its New Testament understanding and therefore problematic in its possible quantification.⁶¹ Neufeld finds ‘passionate spirituality’ deeply rooted in the New Testament as it points us to the challenge of discipleship oriented communities. However, he notes that Schwarz tends to put radical discipleship almost at the same level as

⁵⁸ Barrett mentions in her article: the centrality of the reign of God, the coming fulfilment of the reign of God on earth, the nature of the church as sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God etc.

⁵⁹ T. Y. Neufeld, *Natural Church Development and the New Testament: Comparison and Assessment*. Presented at the same conference as Barrett’s paper. The article can be found at http://www.newlifeministries-nlm.org/online/aec99_yoder_neufeld.htm

⁶⁰ Though he states that it is like evaluating ‘apples’ in the light of ‘oranges’. The reasons for this statement follow in his article.

⁶¹ ‘While in the *Implementation Guide* the specific nature of what constitutes love is largely left undefined, the examples of love Schwarz gives in *Natural Church Development* are how often people invite each other over for coffee, have extra-curricular events at church, how much laughter is present in the life of the church, or how frequently they affirm each other (NCD, 36). These are by no means unimportant, and I would certainly want to be part of a joyful congregation. But I think that the love of which Jesus speaks in John 15, for example, or of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 13 is broader and deeper, most especially if its absence can render even the most spectacular of gifts null and void (1 Corinthians 13)’.

legalism and inhospitality.⁶² Neufeld refers to Schwarz's *Natural Church Development* where he writes about passionate spirituality and its relationship to growth of the church. Schwarz states that orthodox convictions are by no means a growth factor. It is his view that, though a church is orthodox, this is not a guarantee for growth as long as the church does not practice her faith with 'contagious enthusiasm'.⁶³ The danger of filling the concept 'orthodox' with a strict negative load is obviously present here. Orthodoxy cannot simply be defined as legalistic and judgmental, though this may be the connotation Schwarz is referring to. I do not believe Schwarz would reject radical discipleship but he could have been a little bit more precise in using the term 'orthodox'. In this way I am with Neufeld who states that 'passion and zeal, joy and celebration, are not the enemy of radical faithfulness but evidence that it is the Spirit of Christ that is inspiring faithfulness'. The quality characteristic need-oriented evangelism finally receives some considerable criticism. Neufeld points out that evangelism is assigned too much to the individual engagement of the 10% gifted people.⁶⁴ Based on his New Testament analysis he sees it going far beyond the engagement of individual Christians and individual needs. Evangelism is about the believing community, which shares the Gospel to the 'human community as a whole, most particularly to those pushed to the margins by oppression, poverty and sin'. He touches a serious issue here, since it is quite obvious that evangelism and justice-social action are disconnected. The entire serving role of the church in society, may it be small or big, is stripped off here. Does this mean that the Gospel is reduced simply to sharing it for the sake of individual salvation? We need to be very critical here. Schwarz may oppose and argue that this is not his intention and I am sure it isn't,⁶⁵ but it ends up here in a church development methodology and affects directly the practice of the church. For Baptist churches it is the right time to reflect more on their involvement in justice, peacemaking, conflict-resolution and social action and to balance the church's witness.

Neufeld finalises his comparison of 'apples' and 'oranges' by introducing a similar theme to that of Barrett. He is interested in the 'what' and 'why' of the church and is basically looking for a more comprehensive set of biblical key themes that could inform the practice of church development. He wonders what would have happened if specific theological key characteristics deliberately and explicitly had been taken from the New Testament instead of analysing numerical growth of

⁶² T. Y. Neufeld, *ibid.*

⁶³ Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, p.26-27.

⁶⁴ According to Schwarz 10% of the believers have the gift of evangelism. *Natural Church Development*, p.34.

⁶⁵ Read his *Paradigm Shift in the Church*.

worldwide churches. By way of illustration he then lists a number of normative statements based on biblical texts which would need to be part of a new questionnaire. Neufeld plays with it a bit, but this little exercise leads to adding four quality characteristics to the eight already existing: (9) messianic consciousness; (10) radical peaceableness; (11) hunger for justice and (12) solidarity with the poor and others on the edges of society.⁶⁶ I am not quite sure what exactly he means by ‘messianic consciousness’, but the other three are clear. He is fully aware of the fact that this correction is still no guarantee. What is at stake here is the character of the church, the way she lives out her own God-given nature. Neufeld suggests a very important corrective to Schwarz’s model. The missional identity of the church has to be spelled out more explicitly by applying biblical key themes. Hays suggested several of these themes in his work on New Testament ethics.⁶⁷ He uses key-themes to address the ethics of the community of faith: e.g. the fellowship of His suffering (Paul), taking up the cross (Mark), training for the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew), liberation through the power of the Spirit (Luke-Acts) etc. These themes are especially useful in looking at the quality of church life but have to be translated into an action model.⁶⁸ This brings us back to Barrett, who referred to yet another attempt to define indicators of a healthy church.⁶⁹ Barrett is part of the ‘Gospel and Our Culture Network’ in the US and Canada, that focuses on doing research in churches on empirical indicators of a missional church. This research group has set up a working document in which the empirical indicators ‘might be some of the key aspects that contribute to the church’s unique saltiness and yeasty nature’.⁷⁰ Though these are the result of analysis in North American culture, I am convinced that these indicators can also be contextualised in Europe. By means of an illustration I will include two of the indicators, (1) the missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus and (2) this community has a vital public witness:

What it looks like: The disciple identity is held by all; growth in discipleship is expected of all.

People are not expected automatically to know the ‘way of doing things in the reign of God’. Citizenship in the reign of God is learned. The learned protocol involves primarily those behaviours and processes that witness to the way of Jesus, who is forming his people for life in the

⁶⁶ T. Y. Neufeld, *Natural Church Development and the New Testament*.

⁶⁷ R. B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics. (San Francisco: Harper, 1996).

⁶⁸ In a forthcoming publication with the working title *Identity and Renewal* I will pay more attention to a working model on the basis of this.

⁶⁹ Barrett, *Marks of the Faithful Church – Marks of the Successful Church*.

⁷⁰ The full text can be found at <http://www.gocn.org/indicators.htm>

reign of God. The community does not simply rely on 'how we've always done things here', or 'that's how we Baptists/Lutherans/Presbyterians/Methodists/etc. do it', or even 'that's how we do it in the company where I work'. Rather, the community seeks critically to integrate already-learned practices with skills and habits of Christian discipleship. This community shows evidence of growing, changing, and deepening the skills and habits of discipleship. Nurturing citizenship in the reign of God is an overall priority of the church for all members of the community of faith.

- New participants in the community indicate that they are being helped to integrate their life with the practices and habits of life in the reign of God.
- Existing participants in the community indicate that they are engaged in a life-long process of integrating their life with the practices and habits of life in the reign of God.
- Illustrations can be given of how people are learning how to pray, and are discovering prayer as a powerful resource for living in the reign of God.
- The community demonstrates a variety of ways in which participants train, mentor, or nurture one another as the community seeks to develop, across the entire spectrum of participants, the capabilities (ways of thinking, perceiving, and behaving) required of disciples who are attempting to follow Jesus Christ.
- Members can identify several different ways of thinking, perceiving, and behaving that are characteristic of life in Christ which differ significantly from the ways of the culture in which people find themselves on a daily basis. They can give at least two or three examples of how those differences are being practised in the life of the congregation. (Examples might include rejection of competitive and coercive ways of interaction, use of language that expresses a Christian worldview, attitude toward money and possessions that reflect God's generosity and abundance, exercise of power through service rather than domination).
- The church organisation is characterised by the participants as one that is ever open to change, to new and expansive ways of organisational thinking and behaving that enable rather than block the cultivating of faithful discipleship.

What it looks like: The church makes an observable impact that contributes to the transformation of life, society, and human relationships.

What the community intends to be and do actually does occur, and is confirmed both by those who participate in the community (e.g. ‘I have learned here that I can disagree and I don't have to leave’) as well as by those who do not, (e.g. ‘Oh, you're the church that always helps clean up after floods and tornadoes’). Like political ambassadors, people know and can articulate where their allegiance lies. They know and can articulate the nature and expectations of the mission that has been given to them. Its public deeds do not consist of imposing its moral will on others, but of giving hard evidence of the reign of God that intrudes as an alternative vision and practice.

- The community defines itself as ‘sent’ – representative of the reign of God and offering alternative ways of life to the world, where participants know themselves to be accountable to one another and to God for the faithfulness of their witness in daily life. Members of the local neighbourhood and/or larger church can give examples which illustrate a variety of actions through which the church, over time, has communicated God's love in the immediate locale and elsewhere.
- Members can identify examples of actions and activities that have resulted in the transformation of lives, changed conditions, promoting justice and combating evil (i.e. economic injustices, violence, discrimination, addiction, oppression, etc.)

Summary and conclusion

We have been revisiting Christian Schwarz's church development model. We approached it from the perspective of the emphasis on church renewal in general and looked further for an informed understanding of his model of analysis. We have presented the challenge Schwarz faced in looking for factors that determine healthy and growing churches. He has done a tremendous work in developing these. Yet in analysing his model we expressed some serious methodological and theological/missiological concerns which need to be taken into account. Further analysis and new research needs to be done. A suggestion might be to set up a taskforce or research group that could work on some repairwork or develop more deeply the challenges Schwarz has put forward to us. A serious attempt needs to be made to use the empirical indicators as developed by the

Gospel and our Culture Network. Growing local 'flowers' might be the hardest challenge for all.

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The Hughey Lectures for 2002

will be held at

IBTS, Prague on

4 and 5 November 2002

The lecturer is

Dr Tadeusz Zielinski from Poland

Dr Zielinski was, until recently, a member of the Polish Parliament. He lectures in theology at the Warsaw Baptist Theological Seminary and within the theological faculty of the University of Warsaw

His PhD was on Roger Williams and soul freedom

The subject of this year's lectures is

'Baptists and Politics'

THE TRIUMPHANT LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN PATRIOT

As a rule, religious theorists divide reality into two spheres: the *sacrum* and *profanum*.¹ Religious people are aware of their own sinfulness and the distance that separates them from God. 'This world' is perceived as fleeting, and therefore unworthy of placing any hope in, and even more so of investing the talents with which people have been endowed. Praise is solely due to God 'in heaven'. This leads to a constant rivalry between the forces of light and darkness, between eternity and worldliness. The tendency to go to extremes means that people usually perceive themselves as either citizens of heaven or as citizens of earth. On the other hand, many Christians have tried to find a path halfway between these two poles of reality in the belief that there is no conflict between them. H. Richard Niebuhr has differentiated five attitudes towards these conflicts.² The first assumes the total alienation of the believer from secular culture, the second perceives earthly reality as the Kingdom of God and the three remaining attitudes postulate the intertwining of the *sacrum* and *profanum* in different ways.

Even the most radical proponents of the separation of the Church from the 'world' are, however, aware of the inevitability of living in a given culture. Therefore, they have to use a defined set of linguistic symbols and are obliged to abide by the laws accepted by the majority of citizens. History also shows that attempts to create a biblical or Christian state lead to serious social tensions. In my opinion, this is proof of the fact that taking on one-sided attitudes constitutes a misinterpretation of God's will towards man. Christians have been called to serve the world and life, as said Martin Luther, in both a secular and spiritual regiment. Jesus himself stated 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's'.³ Taking the 'middle path' appears to be essential to fulfilling the Great Mission.⁴

Each community of people has its authorities and models. For Polish Baptists living in the mid-twentieth century, this was most certainly Łukasz Dziekuć-Malej – an exceptional figure with a remarkable ability to connect the spiritual with the secular dimension. From today's perspective this does

¹ See Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Fenomenologia religii (The Phenomenology of Religion)*, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1997.

² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Chrystus a kultura (Christ and Culture)*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Crocow 1996, pp. 55-60.

³ See The Gospel according to Luke 20, 25.

⁴ See The Gospel according to Matthew 28, 19-20.

not seem particularly difficult or hard to do, as many Christians are educated people, participating in the social lives of their environments and thus fulfilling their spiritual mission. However, in pre-war Poland such things could not be taken for granted. Aleksander Kircun described a particular situation occurring in 1937, when a grammar school pupil was not allowed to read secular books. He had to devote a lot of time to persuading his parents that a secular education and participation in secular life is not a bad thing for a Christian, quite the opposite – it could help to gain a better understanding of other people and to pass on the message of the Gospel.⁵ This example shows that Dziekuć-Malej served as a model of the ‘middle way’, as he was a great preacher and at the same time a patriot that loved his homeland, Belarus. An important fact that is worth emphasising is that this dual attitude helped him fulfil his mission – he set up many churches and baptised hundreds of people.

Łukasz Dziekuć-Malej was born on 1 October 1888 in Słonim.⁶ There he completed his primary and secondary education. In 1906 he graduated from teaching college and, just like his father before him, he started teaching in a state school. He later held the post of educational inspector in the Grodno province. He came from an Orthodox family and was confronted with the Gospel for the first time whilst performing military service in Białystok in 1911.⁷ In the following year he was baptised and commenced active mission work, which led to his arrest by the Tsarist authorities. On being released from prison in Brześć nad Bugiem, Dziekuć-Malej travelled to St Petersburg in 1913 where he completed two years at theological seminary. He did not, however, stop preaching the Gospel. Under his influence many members of the Orthodox church, including clergy, converted, for which he was persecuted on numerous occasions (for example, he was tied to a horse and led through the streets of St Petersburg⁸).

On completing his studies he moved to Grodno, where, in addition to preaching the Gospel, he commenced political activities within the structures of the emerging Belorussian People's Republic. In 1918 he became a member of the Grodno District Council and commissar of the Belorussian government in the district of Krynki-Łunna, where he made a great contribution to organising the Belorussian school system.⁹ In this

⁵ Aleksander Kircun, *O Słowiańskiej Młodzieży Baptystycznej w Polsce (About Slavic Baptist Youth in Poland)*, ‘Słowo Prawdy’, January 1938, p. 5.

⁶ List of Ministers, archive of the Parish of the Polish Christian Baptist Church in Gdansk, sheet no. 26/6/47.

⁷ Michał Odłyżko, *Prezbiter Dziekuć-Malej. Wspomnienia pośmiertne (The Presbyter Dziekuć-Malej. Posthumous Reminiscences)*, ‘Słowo Prawdy’ no. 5, 1957, p. 9.

⁸ See МИНСКАЯ КОЛЛЕКЦИЯ РЕФЕРАТОВ, ЛУКА НИКОЛАЕВЧ-МАЛЕЙ. ЖИЗНЬ И СЛУЖЕНИЕ, <http://lib.promedia.minsk.by/shpargalka/belarus/religion/001/rel-047.htm>

⁹ Halina Głogowska, *Свята незалежнасці на Памор’і*, ‘Ніва’ no. 15, 2000, p. 1.

period he made the acquaintance of many Belorussian freedom activists, including the well-known writer, Anton Łuckiewicz, with which he later translated the New Testament into Belorussian. In the end, however, the free People's Republic of Belarus collapsed and Grodno became part of Poland. In 1919 Dziekuć-Malej was arrested for his political activities by the Polish authorities and was held in the prison in Wołkowysk for several weeks. On returning to Grodno he recommenced his political activities and in 1919 he even participated in a meeting of independence activists in Berlin. As Halina Głogowska termed it '...his activities were highly irritating for the Polish authorities, for which reason he was expelled from Grodno to Brześć'.¹⁰ This happened in 1921. Thereafter, until the Second World War, Łukasz Dziekuć-Malej was exceptionally active in spreading the Gospel and in working with the community throughout the Brześć district. This does not mean that he abandoned his love for his brothers in blood, but that he was realising this through bringing the idea of spiritual freedom in Jesus Christ closer to them.

His fiancée, Serafina Kiszko, accompanied him to Brześć nad Bugiem. After they married at the end of 1921 the couple undertook great efforts to organise the life of the Baptist community, and they also conducted educational and charitable activities. They started their activities by finding a few brothers in faith. By 1926 there were already 200 church members and by the end of the 1930s there were 700. Dziekuć-Malej was a real missionary. He travelled round the entire area on his bicycle, talked to people, baptised and set up churches. He was also active within the Baptist Union. Together with the pastor, Waldemar Gutsche, a well-known preacher, he organised Bible courses and went on missions (e.g. to the Ukraine). In September 1926 he was elected as the deputy chairman of the Council of the Union of Slavic Baptist Churches in Poland. The work in Brześć was very difficult, not only due to the enmity of the Orthodox clergy, but also the lack of appropriate premises.

The congregation founded by Dziekuć-Malej met in a shabby basement and later in a rented house at Unia Lubelska Street. It was only in 1926 that the square at Szeroka Street was purchased for the purposes of building a centre for church activity.¹¹ The building was completed a year later. It was so designed that it was possible to conduct both religious and community activities. In his role as preacher, Łukasz Dziekuć-Malej had not lost his enthusiasm for his earthly homeland. Earlier, in 1922, he organised a cultural association centre under the name 'The Belorussian Cottage', in which he and his wife taught Belorussian, played the violin

¹⁰ Halina Głogowska, *Жыццё і дзейнасць Лукаша Дзекуць-Малёя*, 'Ніва' no. 37, 1999, p. 9.

¹¹ See Krzysztof Bednarczyk, *Historia Zborów Baptystów w Polsce do 1939 roku (The History of the Baptist Churches in Poland up to 1939)*, Wydawnictwo Słowo Prawdy, Warsaw 1997, p. 215 ff.

and preached the Gospel. 'The Belorussian Cottage' became an ideal place for setting up creative contacts with the residents of the local town. Later, in the church centre on Szeroka Street, Łukasz and Serafina Malej organised vocational courses (e.g. tailoring, bee-keeping) for the unemployed and they set up a crèche for orphans, in which they taught themselves. They were also the co-founders of a care home in Narewka. This all meant that their home was always full of people, who were not only able to listen to the Gospel as told by the preacher and his wife, but also to witness their practical involvement, which meant that their mission was highly credible. The pastor, Aleksander Paszko, remembers Łukasz Dziekuć-Malej as a man of the world in the positive sense of the word – he was a representative of the eternal involved in the contemporary, who gained satisfaction from knowing that the people he brought to the church were able to get warm, fill their stomachs and learn something. He was a remarkable combination of the Word and action.¹² He never stopped loving his homeland, Belarus, especially in the difficult times of the Second World War, where again he had an active role in the independence movement structures. In one of his letters from the beginning of 1945 he called Belarus his Mother¹³, which, apart from the fact of his love of God as his Father, has a deep symbolic significance. In the present day, when cosmopolitanism is popular amongst many contemporary Christians this causes one to re-examine one's beliefs and values.

Today Łukasz Dziekuć-Malej is considered to be one of the most important figures in the history of Belarus. Every year on 25 March (Independence Day) activists of the Belorussian Cultural Association 'Chatka' ('The Cottage') lay flowers on his grave in Gdansk in remembrance of a man that was so active in his support of independence. Furthermore, the third volume of the *Encyclopaedia of the History of Belarus* (Minsk, 1996) contains an entry describing the life and activities of Dziekuć-Malej. It particularly emphasises his contribution to propagating the Belorussian tongue and the fact that he was the author of the first full contemporary translation of the New Testament into this language. Between 1920-1924 he translated 17 books, with the majority being published by the Łódź publishing house, *Kompas*. The pre-war newspaper, *Wieczniyi Briest* called him the father of the Belorussian Bible.¹⁴ He started working on the translation in 1920. Initially he and his wife, Serafina, translated the four Gospels. The text was corrected by the well-known Belorussian writer, Anton Łuckiewicz, after which Dziekuć-Malej

¹² МИНСКАЯ КОЛЛЕКЦИЯ РЕФЕРАТОВ, ЛУКА..., op. cit., p. 10. Сomp. С. Пекун, Лука Ніколаевіч Декуць-Малей: жэзнё і служэнне, [w:] *Ролясобы ў жыцці і дзейнасці хрысціянскіх цэркваў Беларусі ў XX стагоддзі*, Мінск 2000.

¹³ See Helena Głogowska, *Новае пра Лукаша Дзекуць-Малея*, „Ніва” no. 49, 2000.

¹⁴ МИНСКАЯ КОЛЛЕКЦИЯ РЕФЕРАТОВ, ЛУКА..., op. cit., p. 7.

handed over the text to his colleague, Waldemar Gutsche, the director of the *Kompas* publishing house. The entire New Testament was published in 1929. In 1931 the second edition of this translation was published in Helsinki by the British and Foreign Bible Society, this time supplemented by Psalms. This was an exceptional situation – a missionary, who at the same time was a translator of the Bible. In his many journeys Dziekuć-Malej had the privilege of being able to use his own translation of the New Testament. It should also be noted that after 1925 it was mainly Serafina Dziekuć-Malej who was responsible for the translation work, thus the New Testament in Belorussian should be considered to be the work of the Malejs (husband and wife) and Anton Łuckiewicz (for these and other activities the Soviet authorities condemned Łuckiewicz to many years in prison, where he later died). Even up to the present day this is considered the best translation of the New Testament into Belorussian.¹⁵

After the invasion of Poland by Soviet forces on 17 September 1939, the situation of the intelligentsia, and particularly the clergy, deteriorated dramatically. On 19 June 1941 Łukasz Dziekuć-Malej was arrested and sentenced to death and his entire family was deported to Siberia. Miraculously the sentence was not carried out, as the German-Soviet war had started. As a consequence the pastor of the Brześć congregation ended up in a labour camp in Germany, where he remained until the end of the War.¹⁶ On returning to Poland, Dziekuć-Malej stayed in Gdansk, as the local Baptist Church was in need of a presbyter. Soon afterwards, he was joined by this wife, Serafina, and their children. With his characteristic enthusiasm Dziekuć-Malej took up mission work again. However this was very difficult to carry out, not only due to restrictions imposed by the state, but above all due to his poor state of health (advanced diabetes). On 31 December 1949 he gave up the post of pastor of the Gdansk church, though keeping the function of district presbyter. Until the end of his life he visited believers and carried out baptisms at sea.¹⁷ Right until the end of his days he was also persecuted by the security services, who accused him of collaborating with British intelligence.¹⁸ In February 1953 Serafina Dziekuć-Malej died, and two years later on 20 January 1955 the presbyter Łukasz Dziekuć-Malej came to eternal rest.

¹⁵ See Jerzy Turonek, *Książka białoruska w II Rzeczypospolitej (Belorussian Books in the Second Polish Republic)*, Slawistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2000.

¹⁶ Michał Odłyżko, *Prezbiter Dziekuć-Malej*, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁷ See Włodzimierz Żółtko, *Historia Polskiego Zboru Kościoła Chrześcijan Baptystów w Gdańsku (A History of the Polish Congregation of the Baptist Church in Gdansk) – a typescript held in the archives of the church at 11 Dąbrowskiego Street*, pp. 10-15.

¹⁸ See Henryk Ryszard Tomaszewski, *Wyznania typu ewangeliczno-baptystycznego wchodzące w skład Zjednoczonego Kościoła Ewangelicznego w latach 1945-1955 (Evangelical-Baptist type confessions forming part of the United Evangelical Church in 1945-1955)*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Słowo i Życie, Warszawa 1991, p. 39.

He was a person with dual citizenship – a citizen of heaven and earth. He was respected and loved by both his brothers in faith – Baptists – and in body – Belorussians. He was able to combine both dimensions of his life in a remarkable way, not only taking no notice of the contradictions, but also virtually using one to serve the other. His passionate patriotism was based on the desire for the Word of God to be present in every corner of Belarus. This twofold attitude of Dziekuć-Malej is best expressed in the posthumous reminiscences written by a colleague from the Church and by the editor of the immigrant newspaper *Biełarus*, published in the USA. ‘We have had to bid farewell to a warrior fighting unstintingly for Christ’s cause, a man of prayer, a faithful member of the Church, a member of the Supreme Council, a minister, a father and head of the family as well as our brother.’¹⁹ ‘The passing away of Ł. Dziekuć-Malej has meant that a person with an incredibly strong will, an indefatigable warrior defending freedom of conscience, a passionate Belorussian patriot, a talented organiser and administrator has gone to eternal rest.’²⁰ His duality expressed and experienced in this way is an example of the successful avoidance of harmful extremism both with regard to theology, philosophy, pedagogy and everyday life. The life of Łukasz Dziekuć-Malej is undoubtedly an encouragement for those seeking a cohesive picture of reality, of which elements are not in constant antagonism.

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¹⁹ Michał Odłyżko, *Prezbiter Dziekuć-Malej*, (*The Presbyter Dziekuć-Malej*) op. cit., p. 10.

²⁰ ‘Беларус’ no. 3 (53), 1955, after Halina Głogowska’s work on Belarussians in Gdansk (in print by Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń).

BOOK REVIEWS

Paul Beasley-Murray

Fearless for Truth: A Personal Portrait of the Life of George Beasley-Murray

Paternoster Press, Carlisle. 2002. 244 pp. £15.99

This biography by a son about his father has a fascination for us as it presents an affectionate and filial account of the life of a great New Testament scholar and esteemed European Baptist.

Dr Beasley-Murray is conscious of the dangers of the task of seeking to record the life and work of a father he undoubtedly admires and believes to have been right on several key issues in which he was involved. He attempts to compensate for this by using recollections of former friends and colleagues of George Beasley-Murray. This is a helpful device, though we await a history of Baptist life in the second-half of the twentieth century to enable us to have a more balanced view of some of the key issues affecting Spurgeon's College, the British Baptist Union and the Southern Baptist Seminary.

What does emerge from this portrait is the picture of a hard-working, evangelical scholar determined to uncover and reflect in a proper and enquiring way on the text of the New Testament. This desire to pursue academic scholarship often met problems in the early years, not least in the failed attempt to register at Cambridge for doctoral studies, being turned down because he was in pastoral charge of a church. However, George Beasley-Murray was not daunted, registering instead for the Cambridge Masters and thereby acquiring additional exegetical skills which would stand him in good stead in later study.

The accounts of his major pieces of academic work, how they came about and who influenced him, make fascinating reading. His interest in eschatology, how he came to write his major work on *Baptism in the New Testament*, and his later desire to return to scholarly writing after his time as Principal of Spurgeon's College, are helpful insights into the dedication to quality reflection of this outstanding New Testament scholar with a heart for evangelism.

His two periods of service for the International Baptist Theological Seminary (1956-1958 and 1995-1996) are reviewed, as is his role within the Baptist Union of Great Britain as President (1968 – 1969) and as Chairman of the Baptist Union Council at the time of the Christological debate of the early 1970s. Perhaps most interesting of all is the stance he

took as a committed evangelical in favour of the ecumenical movement. His positive involvement with the World Council of Churches and his defence of inter-church dialogue do much to justify the title of the book, revealing a Godly man willing to stand firmly and passionately for convictions he had come to hold.

Use is made of the preserved correspondence of Dr Beasley-Murray and this reveals key insights about other European Baptists of that era such as Josef Nordenhaug, Ernest A Payne and David S Russell.

Generations of students at Spurgeon's College, IBTS and Southern Seminary, Louisville, and those who have benefited from his writings, have cause to thank God for George Beasley-Murray. Many others in the wider Baptist and ecumenical world have reason to appreciate him. This book by his son is an eminently readable account of a key person in European Baptist life.

The Revd Keith G Jones
Rector, IBTS

Duke McCall, with A Ronald Tonks

An Oral History

Baptist History and Heritage Society, Brentwood TN.2001 479pp
US\$20.00

Duke McCall is an important person in the world Baptist community. During his long period of service as a Baptist pastor he has been Executive Secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee (1946-1951), President of the famous Southern Seminary (1951- 1979) and President of the Baptist World Alliance (1980-1985).

The book, co-authored with A Ronald Tonks, who retired from the SBC Historical Commission in 1990, is based on a series of interviews conducted over three years in the early 1980s. Those tapes were put to one side, then edited by McCall in the 1990s and published in 2001.

In the preface, McCall makes clear this is off-the-cuff memory and so the serious historian needs to be especially aware there are no footnotes, nor claims for detailed historical accuracy. A typical example of this is a reference to a General Earle Cox on page 378. Presumably the reference is to General Erle Cocke Jnr, a prominent layman in both SBC and BWA.

Armed with this warning, the reader can be entertained, enlightened and infuriated by Dr McCall's account of his life and involvement in the wider Baptist family. For Europeans, there are helpful insights as to how many Baptists in the USA view our own life and work. For those involved in theological education, there is an interesting account of the development

of seminaries in the USA in the post war period. For all of us outside of the southern states of the USA, we have a candid account of cultural life within this large and vibrant Baptist community.

Perhaps this work might serve as a spur to produce oral histories by prominent European Baptists, to render similar service in our own context?

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Dr Nigel G. Wright

New Baptists, New Agenda

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2002, Paperback, 161 pp. £7.99

The title of *New Baptists, New Agenda* seems to promise much less than one actually finds in the subsequent pages of this lively written book, the word 'agenda' threatening to be another buzz word or slogan, calling Baptists 'to remember, to restore and to preserve', even if it is a 'new agenda'. We may call it a 'post...' book or the book that is not afraid to ask *quo vadis?* without 'the altar call'.

The book is written about Baptists from an English Baptist perspective. For an Eastern European, cautious about everything Western that claims to be universal, this should sound acceptable. The era of comprehensive guidebooks and existential DIYs is over. Another major tone of the book that warms the heart of a thoughtful reader is the author's decisive path of modesty, calling the Church of Christ 'to grow beyond the parochial competitiveness of the past' (p.3). This seldom voiced tone in the time of rising politico-religious fundamentalism makes the reader either listen and go on reading or just close the book and stick on another 'L' label.

Following McClendon's broader understanding of the theological task, this book is, indeed, after 'the discovery, understanding, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community'. A key concern and theme seems to be the question of unity and diversity in the Church. First he deals with some popular Christian myths that shaped and still shape theology and practice of the Church, and Baptist churches in Great Britain specifically. In defining Baptist identity, the author finds it helpful to use McClendon's concept of a 'baptist' movement 'in order to place [Baptist identity] within its broader context, (p. 53)' that embraces a much wider community of evangelical believers. Consequentially, in the book's key chapters 4-6 he talks about denominational, ecclesiological and missiological identity of Baptist churches today.

In chapter seven, Dr Wright points out the paradigm shift that took place in the last few centuries, when the Church moved from a dominating power to a dominated minority. Working with authors like Sacks and Bruegemann he offers a new vision for the 'old myths', which emphasised the salvific significance of doctrinal knowledge in line with Enlightenment rationalism, and preoccupation with 'saving souls of the people alone'. The author challenges the conventional and the 'taken for granted' thinking of the role and meaning of the believing community in the life of society today. He moves from his initial 'courage to be modest' to the final *shalom* that Jewish captives in Babylon were called to engage in as they lived in a hostile and unbelieving environment (p.111).

The last three chapters, although important, seem to have little continuity with chapter 7. In chapter 8 the author tries to uncover what the implications of the 'new agenda' for Baptist ministers would be. Unfortunately, on this topic he abandons a very promising and, in my understanding, vital theme of 'lay theology' (mentioned in ch.2, p.26) and lay leadership, a theme creatively developed by the late John Howard Yoder in his *Fullness of Christ*.

Later, Dr Wright discusses one of the very delicate issues in today's ecclesiological debate (we are not concerned at this moment with general public politics) on how to view the homosexual population and its ever-growing acceptance into every form of social life. I can only admire his efforts to work with such 'hot ashes', anticipating, probably, not too much sympathy in some quarters of European Baptists.

The final transformative suggestion for church life is worship. This theme, the author asserts, has been poorly served debating the decibels and wavelengths of the spiritual depth in the history of 'Christian music'. In the last chapter, in the quest to identify the 'true church', we may again see the same recurring fibre of 'less preoccupation with doctrine [of worship], avoiding unitarian sectarianism, and reflecting the needs of a given community in a particular cultural context'.

This book is about finding 'new identity' in the 'new world' that is emerging from the ruins of the world's political, economical and spiritual empires. He is one of the few among Baptists who is calling us away from the role of cherubs that guard a no longer existent Garden into assuming a much needed prophetic, pastoral and apostolic role of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Linas Andronovas

Executive Secretary, Lithuanian Baptist Union